

Seahorse Sanctuary

Suppliers of cultured pipefish and other marine fish

Caring for Banded pipefish and Janss pipefish

Thank you for purchasing our captive-bred pipefish. These fish are unique as we are the first and only commercial breeders of pipefish in the world. Thousands of pipefish are taken from the ocean for aquarium pets but virtually all die in a short time as they are impossible to feed. By purchasing captive-bred specimens, you can enjoy the experience of keeping these remarkable creatures in your own home without contributing to their pointless exploitation in the sea. We are dedicated to the task of providing healthy fishes for your aquarium and would like to learn all we can from your experiences in keeping these amazing animals. If you have any problems, concerns or interesting observations regarding the keeping of your pipefish please contact us via email kalseahorse@westnet.com.au, our website www.seahorsesanctuary.com.au or through staff at the aquarium shop where you purchased them. The following information will help you to provide the best possible care for your new pipefish.

Your pipefish

We breed two species of pipefish, the Banded pipefish (*Doryrhamphus dactyliophorus*) and Janss pipefish (*Doryrhamphus janssi*). The care for both species is exactly the same. Both are found in the west Pacific (including northern Australia) and with proper care will grow to a maximum length of around 18cm. At the time of purchase, your pipefish will be around 6-8 months old and at least 10 cm long. With the best of care they will live for at least three years but no one is really sure how long they live.

Your pipefish have an armour-plated body, which makes them very easy to handle. Simply grasp them gently between finger and thumb in the mid-body region, avoiding the head and tail. A net can be used to coax them to the surface where they can be picked up but avoid lifting them out of the water in the net as they quickly become tangled in the mesh. You can lift them out of the water to move them but don't leave them out too long.

Conservation

At this point we would like to stress that if at anytime you no longer wish to keep your pipefish then **PLEASE** do not release your pipefish (or their offspring) into the local ocean where they do not belong. Instead, return them to the aquarium shop where you purchased them. They are a tropical species and will die in colder water. Should they be released in warmer waters, pipefish could become established and displace pipefish native to that area. To protect the natural Australian wildlife, the same precautions should apply to **all** marine ornamental fish.

Temperature and salinity

Banded and Janss pipefishes are found in tropical waters that are typically around 26°C. In captivity, your pipefish should be kept at temperatures between 24 and 30°C. Prolonged temperatures outside this range, as well as any sudden change in temperature, should be avoided. Your pipefish have been grown in water that is very close in salinity to natural seawater with specific gravity between 1024.0-1024.5, and this should be maintained in your home aquarium.

Important note: Both pipefishes are sensitive to rapid changes in salinity and it is important to check the salinity of your tank and of the transport water and acclimate them very slowly if salinities are very different.

Tanks and tank mates

Your pipefish are strong swimmers and will thrive in any system that provides good to excellent water quality, including reef tanks. Corner foam, box, sub-gravel and canister filters are all suitable. Regular water changes (at least 10% every two weeks) and water testing are necessary for these systems. In the ocean both pipefish species, but particularly Janss pipefish, like to hide in caves but your captive-bred pipefish are not fussy. Your pipefish will certainly appreciate tank decorations that give them the opportunity to hide whenever they are feeling a little shy. Both species can be easily startled and are good jumpers, so a close fitting tank lid is essential.

At the Seahorse Sanctuary we specialize in breeding creatures that can be kept together in perfect harmony, particularly seahorses, pipefish and Peppermint shrimp. Banded and Janss pipefishes can generally be kept together in the same tank (although same sex pairs will fight, see below). A tank containing only pipefish makes a very attractive and interesting display. However, if you wish to keep them with animals other than seahorses or Peppermint shrimp, here are some tips. Avoid either large aggressive fishes or large numbers of smaller aggressive fishes, such as damsels, which will either eat your pipefish or constantly beat them to their food. Anemones, including *Aiptasia*, might sting your pipefish causing sores and/or death. Large nocturnal crustaceans, such as crabs, will catch and eat smaller pipefish while they rest at night.

Feeding

In the sea, pipefish will feed on live shrimps and small fish. When taken from their natural environment and placed in an aquarium, wild-caught pipefish are reluctant to eat dead food and often die of starvation soon after purchase. In contrast, your tank-bred pipefish have been reared on a mixture of frozen mysis shrimp and brine shrimp. **It is very**

important that you feed your pipefish a combination of mysis shrimp and brine shrimp that have been enriched occasionally with multi-vitamins. With this diet, your pipefish will stay healthy and grow quickly.

Feeding your pipefish can be very entertaining as you watch them dash to the food as it floats past. Your pipefish will snap up their food as it sinks in the water. They will clean up the food that sinks to the bottom, however do not allow large quantities of food to sit on the bottom as it will quickly decompose and affect water quality or the health of any fish that returns to it later for a snack. By adding the food slowly, you will ensure that most of the food is eaten while it sinks. Peppermint shrimp are a handy addition to tanks as they quickly clean up any uneaten food.

Pipefish have no true stomach and so do not eat much and do not digest their food very well, so ideally you should feed your pipefish very small quantities of food throughout the day. However, this is not always possible so we recommend that they are fed at least twice per day, once in the morning and again in the afternoon/evening.

To feed them, first place the food in a tea strainer and defrost it under a gently running tap, taking care not to break it up with high water pressure. Add a multi-vitamin preparation once per week to the food (following manufacturer's directions), gently mix it in and leave the food to stand for at least 15 mins. Tweezers can then be used to place small quantities of food into the tank. If you are careful to always add the food at the same place, your pipefish will soon learn to be at that spot when the food arrives. Uneaten food can be stored in the refrigerator provided it is used within 12 hours. The defrosted food can be refrozen in the tea strainer only once before it should be discarded and replaced with fresh food from the packet.

In addition to the frozen food, your pipefish will appreciate some live brine shrimp every so often. This will provide them with some excitement and extra nutrition. It is probably not a good idea to feed them consistently over a long period of time on live brine shrimp as they may be reluctant to return to frozen foods and without enrichment, live brine shrimp will not contain all the essential nutrients for your pipefish.

Sex

Like seahorses, it is the male pipefish who becomes pregnant! The female deposits eggs on the underside of the males' trunk and he carries them until they hatch. Unfortunately, it is virtually impossible to distinguish the sexes of either species by looking at them and instead you must watch how they behave towards each other. Same sex pairs will fight, attacking mainly each others tail and will have to be placed in separate tanks or one returned to the retail outlet. Opposite sex pairs will co-exist peacefully and may even display courtship behaviour where they line up head to head and bob their heads up and down. If they should mate, be warned that baby pipefish are tiny and very hard to see let alone rear.

Health

The key to seahorse health is keeping them well fed and in a stable environment. We have found that with regular feeding and frequent water changes to maintain good water quality, our pipefishes are more hardy than seahorses and rarely get sick. The most common reason for ill-health in our stock occurs when they are placed in tanks containing diseased fishes. If you are concerned for their health, please contact your local retailers for advice.

We hope that this information answers most of you questions. In addition there are plenty of websites devoted to seahorses and their care, some of which are included below.

- www.seahorse.org
- www.syngnathid.org
- www.reefkeeping.com/issues/2003-04/hcs3/index.php